

JENNIFER CONNELLAN : FUTURE FOCUSED

Capistrano is an Education Hub

A group of 15 leaders from both the public and the private schools in the Capistrano Valley carved two hours out of their busy schedules on April 2 for a collective brainstorming session.

Hosted by the San Juan Chamber of Commerce, the group met at the CUSD District Office at 7:30 a.m. for an early-morning, open-forum discussion to address common issues surrounding education. There were eight school principals in attendance, as well as CUSD district representatives, Saddleback College officials, and key members of the business community. It was an incredible opportunity to discuss common challenges, share proven solutions, and find ways to collaborate in order to more effectively serve the students in San Juan Capistrano.

The ideas generated by the meeting were extremely inspiring.

As a member of the Chamber Commerce's Education Committee, I had the opportunity to share in the experience and witness firsthand the powerful synergy that can be created by big thinkers. There were many topics cov-



ered, but two that stand out in my mind as I reflect back: the Breakthrough America program and the joint marketing initiative for the schools in San Juan Capistrano. Both addressed one key question: How can public and private schools work together to better serve the students in our community?

Given that public and private schools sometimes tend to act more like enemies than allies, the discussion could have been quite contentious. However, this was most certainly not the case. What I saw instead was collaboration and common passion for the betterment of education.

A prime example of this is the Breakthrough San Juan Capistrano program. This is a program currently being sponsored by St. Margaret's Episcopal School that provides a unique educational opportunity for high-potential, low-income middle school-age students who attend public school in San Juan Capistrano.

Last year, 2006 was its inaugural year and over 20 students from Marco Forster Middle School were selected to partici-

pate. They are now taking part in a two-year tuition-free academic enrichment program led by outstanding college and high school students who are interested in a career in teaching. Both Marcus Hurlbut, Headmaster of St. Margaret's, and Carrie Bertini, Principal of Marco Forster, are absolutely thrilled about the program and they attested to the tremendous impact the program is having on the students.

In addition to Breakthrough Program, another great example of public and private school collaboration is a joint marketing endeavor designed to highlight education in San Juan Capistrano. A new brochure to market San Juan Capistrano as the 'education hub' that it has become was unveiled at the meeting, and received an enthusiastic response. The leaders recognized that education has not traditionally been what San Juan Capistrano is known for. Yet, the huge

variety of schools we have within our borders is nearly unparalleled by any other city in Orange County. If we can increase San Juan's visibility by touting the education opportunities available here, local businesses will benefit, real estate will benefit, and of course our schools will benefit. It was exciting to feel the energy created in the room from launching a campaign that is so beneficial to all parties involved.

Overall, the 2nd Annual School Leaders Meeting was a tremendous success. Opportunities for large-scale discussions about the challenges and triumphs within education are few and far between, but they are clearly invaluable in terms of their impact. San Juan Capistrano is fortunate to have such caring, compassionate and knowledgeable leaders who are willing to work together to better serve our students.

JENNIFER CONNELLAN IS THE CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF FUTURE FOCUSED, WHICH HAS OFFERED HIGHLY EFFECTIVE LIFE COACHING AND TUTORING SERVICES FOR TEENAGERS SINCE 2003. SHE HAS TWO MASTER'S DEGREES IN PSYCHOLOGY AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE DEALING WITH ADOLESCENT ISSUES. REACH HER BY EMAILING JENNIFER@FUTUREFOCUSED.COM



Little Brother Daniel of San Juan Capistrano (right) participated in Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County's "Big Night with the Arsenal" at the Anaheim Convention Center on April 7. He and Big Brother James Mortensen of San Clemente (left) enjoyed a NBA Development League game between the Anaheim Arsenal and Los Angeles D-Fenders, had a chance to meet the players and take part in a basketball clinic. Big Brothers Big Sisters matches an adult mentor with a child in need; more volunteer "Bigs" as well as "Littles" are needed. Visit www.bigbrooc.org or call (714) 544-7773.



Tanner Eubanks, a senior from Saddleback Valley Christian School in San Juan Capistrano, put on a basketball clinic for 12 children in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County (BBBSOC) program. Participants enjoyed a day of basketball instruction, a pizza lunch provided by Tanner, and awards at the end of the day. BBBSOC provides adult mentors, or Big Brothers or Big Sisters, to children in need. Additional "Bigs" as well as "Littles" are always needed. Visit www.bigbrooc.org or call (714) 544-7773.

Photos courtesy of Noly Guardamondo/Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County